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The Ancient and Honorable Man.

A

DISCOURSE

PREACHED ON THE OCCASION OF THE DEATH OF

HON. JOHN QUINCY ADAMS,

TO THE

UNITARIAN CHURCH AND CONGREGATION,

KEENE, N. H.

ON SABBATH AFTERNOON,

March 5, 1848.

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BY A. A. LIVERMORE.

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TO

THE YOUNG MEN

OF HIS PARISH,

THIS DISCOURSE IS AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED,

BY THEIR

FRIEND AND PASTOR.

S E R M O N .

ISAIAH, III. 1-3.

“FOR BEHOLD, THE LORD—DOETH TAKE AWAY—THE MIGHTY MAN—
THE JUDGE,—AND THE PRUDENT, AND THE ANCIENT—AND THE
HONORABLE MAN, AND THE COUNSELLOR—AND THE ELOQUENT
ORATOR.”

IT is the office of the pulpit to discourse not only upon the abstract truths of Christianity, but upon their application to the lives of men. It is to interpret the whole of human life by the wisdom which is from above. It is to justify the ways of Providence to man, and persuade him to bow to them with a filial trust. And oftentimes by illustrations drawn from history and biography, it may be possible to unfold and enforce the duties of the disciples of Christ in a more effectual manner than by any amount of general reasoning and exhortation. The Catholic Church has its calendar of saints, and a special day set apart to commemorate with religious services their virtues. If we forbear, out of respect to a higher than any human tribunal, to canonize any man, living or dead, we are not therefore debarred from dwelling in the solemn meditations of the sanctuary upon the great and the good.

The occasion of these remarks is obvious. And as the iron tongue in the tower above has already discoursed, for its brief hour in sad and monotonous knell, of the bereavement that has fallen upon the country, it may be proper with the living tongue to speak of him over whose tomb a great nation bends in heartfelt sorrow and reverence. It is not my purpose to repeat the eulogies of others, or to spend the allotted season in glorifying the dead. He that was known through the world as one of the greatest of living men, and whose praise has been uttered by the most eloquent voices of the capitol, needs not the humble service of the village church to emblazon his fame, or embalm his memory. But something should be done for our sakes, if not for his, to draw the moral of his life, and to make a practical improvement of the sublime lessons which it has taught us. For "he, being dead, yet speaketh."

JOHN QUINCY ADAMS was born in what is now Quincy, Mass., on the 11th of July, 1767, and died at Washington, on the 23d of last month, in the eighty-second year of his age. For sixty-seven years of this protracted life, he was more or less engaged in the public service, from the humble post of private secretary of legation to the office of President of the Union. His childhood and youth, which were passed under the care and culture of his distinguished father and a most noble and heroic mother, well fitted him to act a high and useful part in all these various stations. Of the spirit of the latter a single quotation from a letter written to him by her while in Europe, at the age of eleven years, is a sufficient evidence,—* "Dear as you are to me, I would much rather you should have found your grave in the ocean you have crossed, or that any untimely death crop you in your infant years, than see you an immoral, profligate, or graceless child." Such counsels, of Spartan firm-

* Mrs. Adams's Letters, vol. i, p. 123.

ness and Puritan principle, must have sunk deep in the boy's heart, and moulded the future man. She further said, "Great learning and superior abilities, should you ever possess them, will be of little value and small estimation, unless virtue, honor, truth, and integrity are added to them. Adhere to those religious sentiments and principles which were early instilled into your mind, and remember that you are accountable to your Maker for all your words and actions." A life of untainted virtue, of spotless honor, of fearless truth, and incorruptible integrity, in public and private, amid the corruptions of foreign courts, and on the dizzy heights of power, now testifies that these words were not in vain. He was all that she taught him to be. He lived out all her precepts. He planted no thorns in his memory by youthful dissipation. He turned not one hair grey by abusing the vigorous constitution which God gave him. His mind was clear and effective to the last. "His eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated." In the words of another,—* "Standing upon the extreme boundary of human life, and disdaining all the relaxations and exemptions of age, his outer frame-work only was crumbling away. The glorious engine within still worked on unhurt, uninjured, amid all the delapidations around it, and worked on with its wonted and iron power, until the blow was sent from above which crushed it into fragments before us."

His last words were, that "it was the end of earth, and that he was composed,"—thus expressing at once his good conscience, his christian submission, and assured immortal trust.

There may have been, and there may be now, greater intellects in this country than the mind of the departed; but never one that had better done its duty to itself, and that

* Gov. McDowell, of Virginia.

was more fully alive in every faculty and power, and that was always in finer working order; never one that had accumulated richer stores of human and divine lore; never one that could act at once the poet, the philosopher, the theologian, and the statesman with more zeal and ability. He was a universal man. His mind was encyclopedian. There may be more refined and angelic characters than his, but not one into which had been imported a larger amount of substantial, pure-minded, Christian principle, and more fervid Christian sentiments. Whatever he did, he did with his whole might, and threw himself into the scale with what he felt to be right, let who would be on the other side. There may be leaders of parties in our land that are regarded with more enthusiastic interest by their adherents; but never one who was so universally respected and loved by men of all parties, and who has received such a general outburst of mingled regret and reverence at his decease. Cold and severe as some may have thought him to be in his manners, he had yet won a place in the universal heart of the people; and it was because they had confidence that he was a thoroughly good man. All hearts melted into sympathy when it was known that he was dying at the Capitol, and the crowds which gathered around him were as children who drew to the bed-side of a father, to weep and pray during the last struggles of nature.

Believing that God is in history and in biography, and that he would teach us by great examples, great truths and duties, what lessons are we to look for in the life and death of this eminent Christian statesman? What can he do for our young men, and for our old men too? What direction can his example lend to our plans? What inspiration breathe into our hopes? What rebuke administer to our weaknesses? and with what shame crimson our sins? This is the lesson of to-day, and we would bow to hear it with waiting and reverent hearts.

Not the least of these instructions is the wonder-working power of *Industry*. The subject of these remarks was gifted with splendid intellectual and moral endowments. His breast was lighted with the fires of genius. But because Heaven had given him ten talents instead of one, he did not therefore feel at liberty to squander them. What God bountifully gave, he generously cultivated. He diligently resorted, from early years, to the books, teachers, means, and institutions that would develop, refine, and strengthen his capacities. He never finished his education till the day of his death. He was always learning and always coming to the knowledge of the truth. In the midst of the most active, perplexed and responsible public duties, with the cares of a nation upon his mind, he never relaxed his studies. He was a scholar his life long. His industry began with the morning sun, and was as untiring and punctual as that luminary. He had no fear of the mechanism of habit. He well knew that a life without method is a life without honor. The round of the hours he paced with the regularity of a sentinel on guard, and every striking of the clock announced to his conscience that all was well. He had domesticated in his heart the wish of the poet :

“ And as each morning sun shall rise,
O, lead me onward to the skies.”

No man, perhaps, ever performed, for so many years, a greater amount of intellectual and official labor. And order and energy were the keys he carried to unlock the intricacies of public affairs, and the hoarded treasuries of knowledge. The utmost vigilance in the cares of state never absorbed his attention to the exclusion of his own self-culture. He well knew that the fountain which is perpetually drawn from, must be as perpetually filled. He had tasks that required the most athletic intellect. Hence his private studies were those of a devoted student, while his public engage-

ments were those of the most laborious statesman. To mention a single item ; he read, as I learn from good private authority, the whole of Cicero's voluminous works since he was fifty years old. What an example of patient and persevering labor to set before the men of this generation ! He was not ashamed to be a hard worker.

How long will it take the world to learn that industry is one of the foundation stones to the edifice of a great and useful life ; and that, in more senses than one, if any will not work, neither shall they eat ! Toil, hard, patient, lifelong toil alone can build up men, and scholars, and Christians. If God have given us powers, it is that we may use them ; if time, it is that we may improve it ; if opportunities, it is that we may take advantage of them, for his service and the good of men. Not the least of the sins with which we are blackening the fair pages of the book of life, is lost hours and lost days. It must smite us with an unusual pang of regret, to reflect that we can never regain what we have thus misspent.

We see, in this notable example, what these days need to learn, *the power and influence of the individual man*. This is an age of associations and majorities ; we must not overlook the rights or the power of the few or the one. Thought governs, not numbers. Souls, like arguments, are to be weighed, not counted. Public opinion, after all, is not what is collected, but what is first manufactured and sent out, and then gathered together again, and labelled as the voice of the people. Leading minds, popular talents, do the thinking for a country, and give stamp and pressure to the age. One will, clear and self-assured and persistent, is stronger than thousands. The column of water in an inch tube can balance the ocean. One man, whose soul is in the thing, can change a whole town, or county, or state, in a quarter of a century, if he have tact and wisdom, and essentially and forever modify their ideas

upon education, or religion, or government. He may, it is true, be the product of his times, but his times are the product, too, of him. If the Reformation made Luther, Luther, too, made the Reformation. We have seen reformations fail because they had no Luther. If Methodism created Wesley, yet Methodism alone, or the state of public sentiment that was ripe for it, without Wesley, would have been only smoke without fire.

In Mr Adams, we had what is too rare in this country, a bold, independent, original mind, that did its own thinking, stood upon its own basis, and asked no man's consent to exist or act. His individuality might sometimes run into caprice, or passion, or obstinacy; who shall calculate to a hair's breadth the orbit of so mighty a will? But he was always himself, and not another man's. Still, he affected not to be singular, but to be true to his own idea of right. He never could be accused of giving up to party what was meant for mankind. And he had his reward. Called impracticable, scolded at and brow-beaten by turns on all sides,—sometimes standing alone, like a rock in mid-ocean, and lashed by the winds and waves from every quarter, yet at last all parties came round, did him justice, and loaded him with praise, and falsified the stigma that republics are ungrateful. In the great battle which he fought for liberty and right, almost single-handed at first, he never swerved nor faltered, but persevered year after year, until he gained the victory. He was stronger in himself, and in the right, than any party, or all parties,—than the whole country besides. Lures and bribes, and anonymous threats of assassination never silenced his voice, or stayed his pen, when right and freedom were in danger of being cloven down.—How glorious the power of the individual man when he weds himself to great principles, and in the strength of the living God goes forth conquering and to conquer! Such a man shall not die before he can give thanks that “the

seal is at last broken." It is an honor to New England to have produced so great a character, so vast a will, so heroic a soul. It is better than a thousand arguments to repel the charge of her narrow-mindedness, and fanaticism, and lack of patriotism. He was the consummate flower of his native land, and the representative of all its best leading ideas and characteristics,—its Puritanism, its industry, its enterprise, its education, its liberty, its reformation spirit. It has been most truly said, * "His character seemed an embodiment of the heroic past," while "he shadowed forth the ideas by which the world is to be carried along in its future progress." "Mighty sage! Noble champion of freedom! Nothing can rob our institutions of the glory of having produced such a man."

But we must consider now what ought never to be left out of account in our estimate of character, for it is somehow its all-pervading essence, *the religion, the worship, the faith*, of the ancient and honorable man. Here the task is easy. We do not have to hunt after distant evidences, or rebut suspicions, or labor to raise distrust into conviction. No man ever doubted that Mr Adams was a devout, consistent, straight-forward, sincere Christian. None among all the hosts of his enemies ever dared to tarnish his pure fame with whispers of gambling, or debauchery, or intemperance. His youth was pure, his manhood and old age without spot or blemish in all Christian faith and good works. He died the death of the righteous. All was complete and consistent and beautiful throughout. He carried the savor of his mother's prayers from the cradle to the Capitol, where fell the last trembling sands of existence. He had been through the honors, and dangers, and pleasures, and perplexities of a varied and tried life, and he came out of the fur-

* Mr Dwight, of Springfield, in the Massachusetts Legislature.

nance untouched and unscathed—his faith, and hope, and charity stronger, and broader, and livelier than ever.

He was a theologian as well as a practical disciple. He was not only a reader, but a profound student of the word of God; and he found it to be an unfailing fountain of life. He was accustomed for fifty years to peruse the Scriptures in at least seven different versions, in different languages,—ancient and modern,*—and to read them through in this manner every year. He completed an entire poetical paraphrase of the Psalms of David; and in one of the most approved † collections of hymns, published within a few years, twenty-two are from his pen. The fire and beauty of his devotional poetry may be seen in two almost as fine Christian lyrics as any in the language; one on Time, and another on the Death of Little Children, in our own Hymn Book. His fervid piety breaks out in the following hymn for Sabbath morning:—

“Hark! ’t is the holy temple’s bell;
The voice that summons me to prayer:
My heart, each roving fancy quell;
Come, to the house of God repair.

“There, while in orison sublime,
Souls to the throne of God ascend,
Let no unhallowed child of time
Profane pollutions with them blend.

“How for thy wants canst thou implore,
Crave for thy frailties pardon free,
Of praise the votive tribute pour,
Or bend, in thanks, the grateful knee;—

“If from the awful King of Kings,
Each bauble lures thy soul astray?

* These were; (1) our common English Bible; (2) Thomson’s Translation of the Septuagint; (3) the Latin Vulgate; (4) Calvin’s Translation in French; (5) the Catholic Translation in French; (6) Luther’s Translation in German; (7) the New Testament in Greek.

† Rev. W. P. Lunt’s Christian Psalter.

If to this dust of earth it clings,
And, fickle, flies from heaven away?

“ Pure as the blessed seraph’s vow,
O let the sacred concert rise;
Intent with humble rapture bow,
Adore the Ruler of the skies.

“ Bid earth-born atoms all depart;
Within thyself collected, fall;
And give one day, rebellious heart,
Unstained to the Lord of all.”*

He was a Unitarian in faith and doctrines, and was a communicant in the Unitarian Church in his native place, but he disclaimed all sectarian names, and embraced in his ample charity all denominations of Christians. Three years since he presided at the great annual festival of our brethren, and earnest words then dropped from his lips, quivering with age and emotion, recommending charity and good will to all who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. He had none of that miserable error that it is unmanly to be a disciple of Jesus: he subscribed to the poet’s line,—

“ *Christian* is the highest style of man.”

All that parental lips taught, he tested by study and experience, and early convictions grew tenfold stronger.

When absent from his family as Minister of the United States to Russia, he wrote as follows to his son; † “in your letter of the 10th of January to your mother you mention, that you read to your aunt a chapter in the Bible, or a section from Dr Doddridge, every evening. This information gave me great pleasure; for, so strong is my veneration for the Bible, so strong my belief that, when daily read and meditated upon, it is, of all books in the world, that which contributes most to make men good, wise, and happy; that the

* Christian Psalter, Hymn 536.

† Christian Register, vol. 3, p. 144.

earlier my children begin to read it, and the more steadily they pursue the practice of reading it throughout their lives, the more lively and confident will be my hopes that they will prove useful citizens to their country, respectable members of society, and a real blessing to their parents.

“ I advise you, my son, in whatever you read, and most of all in reading the Bible, to remember, that it is for the purpose of making you wiser and more virtuous. I have for myself, for many years, made it a practice to read through the Bible once every year; I have always endeavored to with the same spirit and temper of mind which I now recommend to you; that is, with the intention and desire that it might contribute to your advancement in wisdom and virtue; my desire is indeed very imperfectly successful; for, like the apostle Paul, I find a law in my members warring against the law of my mind. But as I know it is my nature to be imperfect, so I know it is my duty to aim at perfection; and feeling and deploring my own frailties, I can only pray Almighty God for the aid of his Spirit to strengthen my good desires, and subdue my propensities to evil; for it is from him that every good and perfect gift descendeth. My custom is, to read four or five chapters of the Bible, every morning, immediately after rising from bed; it employs about an hour of my time, and seems the most suitable manner of beginning the day. Every time I read the Bible, I understand some passages, which I never understood before.”

Again, he writes to an association of young men in Baltimore, who had solicited his advice about books; * “ The Bible is the book of all others to be read at all ages and in all conditions of human life;—not to be read once, or twice, or thrice through, and then to be laid aside; but to be

* Christian Register, vol. 17, p. 190.

read in small portions of one or two chapters every day, and never to be intermitted unless by some overruling necessity."

"The attentive and repeated reading of the Bible, in small portions every day, leads the mind to habitual meditation upon subjects of the highest interest to the welfare of the individual in this world, as well as to prepare him for that hereafter to which we are all destined. It furnishes rules for our conduct towards others in our social relations.

"If all or any of you have spiritual pastors to guide you in the paths of salvation, do not imagine that I am encroaching upon the field of their appropriate services;—I speak as a man of the world, to men of the world, and I say to you, *Search the Scriptures.*"

"It had always been his delight," he said upon another occasion, "to contemplate the rising and setting of the sun, and to watch the silent and majestic procession of the stars. This sublime vision filled his mind with ever new, elevating and unutterable emotions. It was his usual custom, when at home, to take his stand on a lofty hill near his house, every pleasant morning and evening, as a spot from whence he could catch the first golden beam of the sun as it emerged from the eastern sea, and the latest gleam of its glory as it sank behind the western hills. There nothing could obstruct his survey of the whole visible hemisphere of the sky; and loosing his mind from the narrow enclosure of earthly objects, he endeavored to realize the *motion* of the globe on which he stood, and of all the majestic spheres." As has been beautifully inferred, "we may not wonder that a soul familiar with such high experiences, and daily fresh from communings with the heavenly spheres, (and we may add, the word of God, and prayer,) should stand forth undaunted in the halls of legislation, and unceasingly lift up his voice

like a trumpet amidst the roar of battle for Liberty and Right.”*

And this, finally, brings us to the crowning excellence of his life he was a *Christian Statesman*, and sought to realize a *Christian Commonwealth*. He identified religion with public, as much as private conduct. He was not a *politician*, in the bad sense, so often, unhappily, associated with that word. His *policy* was honesty; his *polity* was rooted and grounded in the principles of Christianity. He might not always, as who does, come up in his conception and practice to the standard of Christ, but that, all concede, was his honest aim. One of the conversations reported of him during the past year brings out this point with prominence. † “I could see,” said a friend who called upon him, “that while his patriotic bosom is agitated with many fears, he still cherishes a good old Puritan ‘hope for the best,’ from the influence of the Bible and of general education in fostering a love of justice and a true spirit of liberty.”

“In conversation, he dwelt much on the importance of bringing out the power of the Christian religion against slavery. He says nothing else will answer,—no other principle but the spirit of religion, and the power of conscience can ever bring about the voluntary and peaceful emancipation of the slaves of this country. He watched with deep interest every movement among religious bodies, which tends to withdraw from slavery the evident countenance, or at least the acquiescent endurance which the Churches have long given to the institution.”

It is most true, as has been said by an eloquent tongue,‡ “he was the champion of human rights not yet vindicated, and which are yet, for a long time, to agitate the world; he

* Rev. Chandler Robbins, *Christian Register*, vol. 18, p. 5.

† *New-York Evangelist*.

‡ Mr Dwight.

led the van in the contest of liberty against slavery;—the future history of the country is to be influenced, moulded, formed, shaped, more by his spirit than by that of any other man of the age.”

“Channing was the silent student, the eloquent expounder of the rights of man. Adams was, in living action, their defender, champion, vindicator.”

When the slaves of the ship *Amistad* had reconquered by force of arms “their unalienable rights” to “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness,” and were exposed to the danger of being dragged back again into all the horrors of Spanish slavery, he stood forth voluntarily as their defender in the Supreme Court of the United States, and gained their cause by dint of the most powerful appeals to truth and right and law. He had his reward. He labored for a people whose gratitude is as proverbial, as their wrongs. When lying in the cold majesty of death in the Representative Hall of the republic, and the great, and the titled, and the proud drew near to look once more on that “human face divine,” there came, too, the outcast race craving to take a last look at their hero and friend, and no homage to the mighty dead was more heartfelt than theirs, no tears welled up from more grateful hearts. Well might he say, in the words of Job, as has been already applied by another, “Because I delivered the poor that cried, the fatherless and him that had none to help him,—the blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me, and I caused the widow’s heart to sing for joy. I was eyes to the blind, and feet was I to the lame. I was a father to the poor, and the cause I knew not I searched out. And I brake the jaws of the wicked, and plucked the spoil out of his teeth.”

He was a patriot in the largest and most blameless sense of that word. He wished, and he lived, toiled and suffered, that his own country might be the joy and glory of the whole earth; that its name might be fragrant in every clime

with justice and peace ; that it might dwell upon the grateful tongues of the most distant generations, as the friend of liberty and humanity, as “ Time’s noblest offspring,” if not “ the last.” Hence he strove as for his life, and had his life been the forfeit, he would have striven the same, that all manner of wrong might be righted, that the oppressed might go free, that peace might wave her olive-branch over the earth, that temperance, and education, and science, and religion might here refine, and civilize, and Christianize a great brotherhood of states, an empire of freedom from sea to sea, a land of eternal righteousness, a great Christian kingdom, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven. Would that his example might inspire our statesmen to aim for the right, not the expedient ; conscious that the right always is the expedient in the end, and that the wrong is always the weak and the frustrated at last, for this after all is God’s world ! Would that our young men might understand that “ peace hath her victories no less renowned than war ;” that the profoundest honor and the everlasting fame belong, by the concession of men of all parties, all sections of country,—and not least of that very quarter against whose peculiar institutions, he shot all the lightnings of his rebuke, and built up the immovable bulwark of his opposition,—belong now and forever to him, who was the soldier of the right, and who fought for the right, though a whole country or a whole world might be up in arms against him !

Mr ADAMS thus belonged to a class, of whom may heaven send us more, that of Christian statesmen ; men, who carry their private convictions of right into their public acts ; men, who dare to do all that conscience dictates to be done, and fear to do more ; men, who believe that Christianity was meant for mankind, as well as for man ; for nations as well as for individuals ; and that as the life of a person cannot be established on any other basis of substantial prosperity

and happiness, except that of right, truth, and love ; so cannot that of a country except upon the same adamantine rock ; that our commonwealths should be Christian, and our cities cities of God.

With his life lengthened beyond the allotted period, he “came to his grave in a full age, like as a shock of corn cometh in in his season.” “Behold the Lord doth take away the mighty man, the judge, and the prudent, and the ancient, and the honorable man, and the counsellor, and the eloquent orator.” Here is no grief. Gratitude, not sorrow, should be the chief emotion ; gratitude for what he was, and did, and what he will ever be in the history of our country and of freedom. The cup of blessing had been filled for him to the very brim, so that another drop would have made it run over. Deeds of pith and honor and mark, words of power and right, a zealous and whole-souled example of Christian and patriotic service, a holy consecration to the cause of humanity had swelled the outline of his years to its perfect circumference, and nothing was left undone. It was “the end of earth,” its trials and discipline, and he was “content.” The Lord’s appointment was the servant’s hour. In the words of one of his own hymns,*

“ Though walking through death’s dismal shade,
No evil will I fear ;
Thy rod, thy staff shall lend me aid,
For thou art ever near.”

And of another ;†

“ Matter and mind, mysterious one,
Are man’s for three score years and ten ;
Where, ere the thread of life was spun ?
Where, when reduced to dust again ?

* Christian Psalter, 154.

† Christian Psalter, 691.

All-seeing God, the doubt suppress;
 The doubt thou only canst relieve;
 My soul thy Savior-Son shall bless,
 Fly to thy Gospel, and believe."

And yet again ;*

" Then, pilgrim, let thy joys and tears
 On Time no longer lean;
 But henceforth all thy hopes and fears
 From earth's affections wean.
 To God let votive accents rise;
 With truth, with virtue live;
 So all the bliss that Time denies,
 Eternity shall give."

* Christian Hymns, 561.





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